



## WHAT'S NEW IN HUMAN RESOURCES PROGRAMS?

### ***Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government***

The Interagency Task Force on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government, under the leadership of the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Kay Cole James, met recently to review the progress of this initiative and plan for the future. At last year's meeting, she called on Hispanic serving organizations to strategically utilize their unique resources to reach out to Hispanics and to attract them to public service. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) announced that it had entered into a strategic partnership with OPM by putting a link on their website to OPM's USAJOBS website. OPM has sent senior officials throughout the United States to share the opportunities available through recruitment fairs and Hispanic sponsored events. Recruitment fairs have been held in eight cities with large Hispanic populations such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, Miami and New York in 2003 and 2004. According to a recent press release, OPM's efforts are twofold. "Outreach to the Hispanic community is part of an overall strategy to bring the best and brightest into Federal service. Additionally, many of the initiatives being undertaken are specifically designed to fix the Federal hiring process by making it easier to apply for and obtain a job with the civil service once the connection to qualified candidates has been made."

### ***Hiring Flexibilities and the 45-Day Hiring Model***

OPM held a Federal hiring summit in June and will hold another one in August for Human Resources (HR) Specialists and program managers on the various hiring flexibilities available for filling Federal jobs. The "wealth of hiring flexibilities" can be used to quickly hire students, recent college graduates, veterans and other qualified individuals. In certain circumstances, OPM will approve a Direct Hire authority when agencies have either critical hiring needs or the need to fill positions for which few qualified candidates exist. Staff members in ITA/OHRM attended the June hiring summit.

Earlier OPM had developed a 45-day hiring model that covers the period from when the vacancy announcement closes until an offer is made. In the fourth quarter of FY 2004, OPM will begin scoring

agency progress in using the 45-day model as part of the Human Capital initiative in the President's Management Agenda. To be scored yellow, an agency must have a regular system for collecting and analyzing data on the stages of the hiring process. A green score will require an agency to make "significant and ongoing progress toward the goal of 45 days—or better—for all hires at all levels."

The time frames allotted in the hiring model are for a range of days from a minimum of nine days to a maximum of 45 days. The steps, responsible officials and time frames are:

- Screen applicants for minimum qualifications (done by HR)—one to five days
- Rate applicants (done by HR)—one to five days
- Apply veterans' preference/Rank applicants/Issue selection certificate (done by HR)—one to five days
- Review applications (done by selecting official)—one to five days
- Schedule and conduct interview (done by selecting official)—one to 15 days
- Check references (done by selecting official)—one to five days
- Make selection(s) (done by selecting official)—two days
- Extend job offer (done by HR)—one to three days

In an automated hiring system, the first three steps generally are done concurrently. The hiring model does not take into account that some positions need a security clearance, which can add days to the hiring process.

### ***Telework***

As part of its ongoing effort to encourage greater Federal participation in telework programs, OPM Director Kay Cole James invited members of the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council and their designees to the Fairfax Telework Center in Fairfax, Virginia on July 6, 2004. Sixteen agency representatives had the opportunity to learn firsthand how the telework centers operate and how they contribute to the effectiveness and the quality of the Federal workforce, according to Director James. She pointed out that OPM can encourage and cajole agencies to provide telework programs but the agencies themselves are the ones that make it work. Since the first telework survey in April 2001 through the October 2003 survey, there has been a 93 percent increase in the number of Federal employees teleworking.

On July 7, 2004, Director James announced that OPM was partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take a unified Administration approach to encourage more telework among the 1.8



million Federal employees. "Telework contributes to conservation goals, reduces traffic congestion and is a vital component of agencies emergency preparedness efforts," the Director said. Michael Leavitt, the EPA Administrator, noted that EPA has promoted telecommuting as a viable work place alternative for years. "EPA actively encourages employees to reduce energy consumption and pollution by participating in our transit subsidy program, carpooling and other environmentally friendly telework activities." OPM recently conducted training seminars for agencies that scored very low in the recent report on telework. Almost 200 people from 19 agencies attended and discussed telework issues such as ways to increase agency participation, improve employees' productivity and integrate telework into an agency's emergency planning efforts. OPM also works closely with the General Services Administration (GSA) by co-sponsoring the Federal Government's Interagency Telework Site, [www.telework.gov](http://www.telework.gov).

Representative Frank Wolf, R-VA, chairman of the House Commerce, Justice, State Appropriations subcommittee placed a provision in that FY 2004 appropriations bill, which would withhold \$5 million from the budgets of the agencies covered by that bill if they are not in compliance with the 2001 Federal Telework Mandate (P.L.106-346). If enacted, each agency would be required to submit quarterly reports to Congress showing progress on teleworking and would need to designate a telework coordinator to oversee the "implementation and operation of telecommuting within each department," according to a statement issued by his spokesperson.

### ***Reemployment Rights of Veterans Returning to Federal Jobs***

OPM's Deputy Director, Dan Blair, recently testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, on existing and proposed Federal protections and benefits for returning servicemen and servicewomen under the Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). The job protections range from placing the individual into the position vacated at the time of the call-up for active duty, or into a position the employee would have attained had there been no call-up, as well as guaranteeing time-based promotions. The Federal government is the single, largest employer of veterans, with approximately 450,000 former servicemen and servicewomen—approximately 25 percent of its total workforce. Blair talked about a proposal to amend USERRA so that Federal employees called to active duty would be eligible for two years of insurance coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program. Currently, active-duty reservists are eligible for 18 months of coverage. Most agencies pay the full share (government and employee) of the FEHB premium. OPM supports the proposed change. There are now

more than 15,000 Federal employees serving on active duty, and Blair estimated that the additional cost of the USERRA amendment to agencies would be \$9.6 million. To read frequently asked questions about USERRA, go to the Department of Labor's website at [http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/faqs/faq\\_911\\_2.html](http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/faqs/faq_911_2.html).

### ***Hatch Act for Federal Employees***

As the political campaign season progresses toward the November election, Federal employees may have questions on what types of political activities they can engage in as well as those that they cannot under the Hatch Act. The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) has some very useful information on its website. It covers "permitted/prohibited activities for employees who may participate in partisan political activity." It also lists agencies and employees prohibited from engaging in partisan politics and what activities these employees are both permitted and prohibited from doing. The OSC website is [http://www.osc.gov/ha\\_fed.htm](http://www.osc.gov/ha_fed.htm).

### ***Quality of Life Issue – Diet/Nutrition and Physical Activity***

There is growing concern about the impact of the increasing problem of obesity on the physical and economic health of a large number of Americans. To help address that issue, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has created the Interactive Healthy Eating Index (IHEI) on its website. The IHEI is an online dietary assessment tool that provides information on diet quality, related nutrition messages and links to nutrient information. A new Physical Activity Tool has been added to the IHEI to assess an individual's physical activity status and provides related energy expenditure information and educational messages. Use of this new tool enhances the link between good nutrition and the health benefits of regular physical activity. The link is <http://209.48.219.53/>. You can also review some Frequently Asked Questions about IHEI at <http://209.48.219.53/FAQ.asp>.

*For Questions or Comments about 'What's New In Human Resources Programs?' please contact Marcia Tyler at 202.482.3166 or [Marcia\\_Tyler@ita.doc.gov](mailto:Marcia_Tyler@ita.doc.gov).*